

You're Gone, Gone Away by Tonight.At.Noon

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Summary: Suddenly, he sees them, and he can't look away.

You're Gone, Gone Away

A/N: Some proof that I don't hate Steve. I felt it was time to give him a voice. Enjoy.

You're Gone, Gone Away

But nothing cuts you quite as deep

As the first time

Vance Joy | First Time

He sees them. He doesn't think they know, but he does. He sees them clear as day. Spring is approaching Hawkins and with it comes a revelation: Nancy sees Jonathan. Not him, not anymore. And he doesn't blame her. He was too cold for too long, he stole something away from her she will never get back. He has come to understand it doesn't matter that he stayed with them when that monster came into the Byers' home—she had already moved on, even if she herself hasn't realised it yet.

That should make it more painful. He recognises the attachment to Jonathan before her—it should hurt; at the very least, it should make him angry. As he stands in the hallway, eyes glued to their closeness, he tries balling his hands into fists, he tries conjuring bitterness and resentment. But he comes up short. Exhaling, he releases his fingers and shakes out his hands, wondering when exactly Nancy chose Jonathan over him.

Was it when Tommy H and Carol decided to take their pent up aggression out on her as he stood by, allowing their greasy hands to write foul words by her name? Or, was it moments later, when he and Jonathan rolled on the hard ground, knuckles brushing against each other's faces?

Maybe it was even later than that. Maybe, while he was alone and

sulking, they shared a moment, or two or three or four, that expelled him from Nancy's mind. Maybe Jonathan accidentally grazed her hand, and maybe that touch, that accidental touch, excited her heart enough to beat uncontrollably in her chest. And maybe the thumping of her heart was so loud, so distracting, she forgot to think about him until his name became a whisper that leaked from her ears.

They are so deep in conversation. Steve watches their heads move closer as they read a sheet of paper, twin smiles dragging their mouths open. Their teeth shine gloriously as they laugh. Their bodies move together perfectly.

Jonathan sees Nancy. Better, probably, than he ever did.

Those pictures he took of her, when Steve first saw them they took his breath away. The beauty of them sucked the air from his lungs. Jonathan was not scratching a repulsive itch as he crouched behind the trees and studied Nancy through the lens of his camera. He was too busy *seeing* Nancy. Seeing the frightened girl as she tried desperately to become something she wasn't.

All Steve saw that evening was a girl submitting herself to him. Only after the deed was completed did he think to worry about her.

The bell rings loudly, awakening Steve from his daze. His eyes snap and pull away from Nancy and Jonathan. They move by him without acknowledging his presence, and he must admit to himself that Nancy's unseeing gaze pushes his heart into his throat and he walks to his next class with the taste of blood dancing on his tongue.

It is time. As the day wears on, and as his heart slides back to its cage behind his ribs and that metallic glaze on his tongue disappears, Steve comes to this conclusion: It is time to let go of Nancy Wheeler.

He tells her on the way home from school that day. She is sitting next to him, reading over the assignments she must complete for Monday. Was she always this beautiful? It crushes him that he has to ask himself this question. Of course she was. He was just too blind to notice.

They are ten minutes from her home when he says her name. "Nancy," he says, and she looks over at him. He keeps his eyes on the road ahead.

"What is it?" she asks.

He hopes they will still talk after this. He will miss the sound of her voice too much if they don't.

Steve inhales. Oxygen sneaks through him like a hit of some powerful, all-consuming drug. "Nancy, we need to break up." He says it quickly, but he thinks he comes out solidly.

"What?" Nancy says, startled. "Why?"

He doesn't respond immediately. He must be careful. "Because," he sighs. The car approaches a stop sign, and his foot presses gently on the break. "Because—Nancy, I see you two together," he says. He has yet to release the break. They are motionless at a stop sign as he struggles to gather his thoughts.

There is no question—Nancy understands the implications of his statement. She knows of whom he speaks.

"Steve, I"—

She is going to apologise, but he can't have that. There is nothing to be sorry about. So, he tells her, "Nancy, you have nothing to be sorry about." He goes on, "You haven't done anything wrong. Neither of you have. You've moved on and I can't blame you for that."

He can't, because he did nothing to stop it from happening. She slipped from him long ago, when he was too careless to try and retrieve her.

"You're good, Steve," she says to him when he finally begins to move again.

"So is he."

They ride in silence the rest of the way. He rolls up to the Wheeler's house, remembering the first time he entered Nancy's bedroom, the

first time he kissed her, held her, saw her. He shakes his head, casting the memories from his head. He will not allow himself to linger. Not yet.

Nancy exits the car and thanks him, sincerity riddled in her voice. He watches her walk away, and when she is out of sight he turns his eyes towards the open road and sets off for home, wondering how long it will take for Jonathan Byers to finally pursue the girl he has just released from his reckless clutches.